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ABSTRACT

The point system used at Boys Town is often misunderstood, but the approach is a middle ground between two extremes: one relying on classical behavior modification, the other, rejecting behavior as a starting place for helping children get better. There are two major characteristics of the Boys Town approach: (1) teaching skills, such as problem-solving and following instructions; and (2) building relationships. The point system is designed to be used only at the start and should be faded as skills are developed and shaped. When point systems are used as the main focus, they become nontherapeutic and possibly harmful to children. When used properly, extrinsic rewards can hold a youth's attention long enough to stop a behavior so that he or she can rediscover the intrinsic reward of success in school. There are several reasons why rewards may not work. Every child, at some time, lacks motivation or confidence to engage in certain skills or activities. Rewards can provide the incentives needed. Concrete, specific reasons that make sense to the child also need to be given for desired behavior. Justifiable paternalism in teaching plays a role in the Boys' Town system. The model of care at Boys Town has three phases; (1) a child comes to Boys Town with their life out of control; (2) caregivers help children gain control by teaching skills and how to build relationships; (3) young people are progressively in charge of their own lives. The behavioral-shaping program is always family-centered. (Author/KB)

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